

### ***“How I Got Here: Veronica—Educator-focused Video”***

Lucy: What's up? It's Lucy and I want you to think about the diversity you have in your classroom. If you stop and ponder the different walks of life represented in each of your classes, you'll probably find that it's a virtual melting pot of backgrounds and personalities. One particular type of student you'll likely find in your school is the migrant farm worker. These kids live in two different worlds. They spend most of their childhood following their parents from harvest to harvest. It's a very transient upbringing. The thought of college rarely comes into consideration. You can't blame them for not seeing it as an actual possibility since higher education was never a real option for their parents.

Many of these kids follow in their parents' footsteps continuing the life of farm work, or entering into similar career paths later on in life. The good news? More and more of these children are finding their way to college despite it being a very tough row to hoe. Pun intended. Our friend Veronica was certainly up for the challenge. Thankfully this girl has got some serious moves. There's apparently no dance step she can't master, and there's also no hurdle she can't leap over. She wanted a different life for herself and her future family, and that's why she focused her efforts on working toward college at a very young age. For her, going to college was nonnegotiable. It was going to happen. She just needed to figure out how.

This mindset is crucial to any student in her situation. Kids need to understand that if they don't like where their life is headed going to college can change their outlook tremendously. Of course, college is an opportunity that's open to everybody no matter the circumstances. It may not feel like that to some kids and their families, but Veronica is a fantastic example of how keeping your eye on the prize can return huge dividends. Her journey is much like that of other children who'll be the first in their family to go to college. There is no frame of reference for them, no how-to guide. Obviously, this can be highly difficult without the right frame of mine, but it also takes a little bit of resourcefulness and exposure to what's possible.

Veronica took part in a job shadowing program that opened her world up to a number of possibilities. These types of programs, whether they're a workplace mentoring setup, a series of career counseling sessions, or some kind of pre-professional internship, can show these first generation students where they can steer their college and career goals. Veronica was certainly no stranger to hard work. She just needed some direction to get out of the fields and into a professional career.

It's important to tell your students that it's very possible to do what Veronica did. It just takes a positive disposition and a mind opened to exploring any and all opportunities that may help pave the way to another life. For right now, dive right into Veronica's story and I'll be right back in a minute.

Veronica: Is this thing on? Hi guys. My name is Veronica and I love to dance. I love to dance because I hate to exercise. That's my form of movement. It's my way to keep active. I dance salsa, merengue, bachata, you name it I'm there.

As a little kid I didn't get to dance a whole lot. I was raised in a family where we were all migrant workers. We were responsible for picking fruits and vegetables. My childhood was a little bit of a mini-adulthood.

I actually didn't get to go to school between the months of March to about October until I was roughly thirteen years old. I always knew that I needed to go to college. It wasn't an option to not do that. I needed to be out of that lifestyle, and I needed to do something different and something better for myself.

As a middle school student I was invited to a job shadowing program where we took a little test and we were told what our strengths were and what our interests were. Mine led me to speech pathology.

Hi there.

As a speech pathologist, I see patients that have had strokes, that may have trouble with speaking.

We're going to go from low to high.

[Eeeeeeeeeeeee 00:04:30]. Good.

Helping my patients makes me feel really happy. It makes me feel that my college education and all of the time that I put into it is totally worth it.

[foreign language 00:04:44]

Speaker 3: [foreign language 00:04:44]

Veronica: [foreign language 00:04:45]

Lucy: One of the biggest hurdles that migrant farm worker students face is the amount of time they spend out of school. Because of the nature of their work schedule, they're only able to attend class for a few months at a time. Naturally we're all oh-so-familiar with that time during the summer break when kids tend to lose some of the instruction they were taught. We call this periods the summer slide. Statistics actually show that lower income students tend to retain less than middle class students. Middle class students also tend to make some gains in reading during this time period. Lower income students not so much.

To put Veronica's situation in perspective, she only attended four months of every school year until she was thirteen. That's way more than a summer slide. That's like a slide/roller coaster/downhill slalom combo type of thing. Needless to say, it was

difficult. The only way for any student to overcome these kinds of conditions is to have some type of major a-ha moment. All it takes is an epiphany of some sort where they identify a career path or passion early on in life. Think about that tie in your life when you knew exactly what you wanted to do and share that with your students. Once that's firmly in their minds, they can use that as motivation to help clear their obstacles and reach their full potential.

Veronica discovered a passion for speech pathology in middle school and that discovery was her guiding light through the rest of her schooling until she had her masters degree in hand. That's not to say that all of your students should lock into one career early on and stick to it. It's definitely natural to change your mind. So long as your students are always thinking ahead and constantly figuring out how to create the life they want, then accomplishing it is all just a matter of putting in the time and effort. They need to know that they have the freedom to dream as big as they want, and speaking of dreams, let's get back to Veronica's.

Veronica: Before Gear Up I knew that I wanted to go to college. Once I started working with them and going through the program, it really solidified my purpose.

Speaker 4: Thank you very much.

Veronica: I graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. Because of my education I have a very different lifestyle from when I was a little kid. I don't just go to work, I get to play too. Here's the math, now I make eighty thousand dollars more per year than my family did as a whole. I have the luxury of owning my own vehicle and having clothes and pretty makeup and nice shoes.

Getting through college was not a walk in the park, but neither was picking fruits and vegetables for ten hours a day under the hot sun. On those days where you're thinking, "Oh, I can't really do this anymore," keep on trying. By attending college, you open so many doors for yourself. Just don't let anything hold you back.

Lucy: Because of her hard work, healthy outlook on life and dedication to making a better future for herself, Veronica is poised to spend the rest of her days helping people, and her nights dancing her heart out. This is the whole reason she wanted to go to college, to have the life she dreamed of, one that's far better than the one she knew growing up.

Keep in mind that there are specific programs and opportunities available for children of migrant workers and their parents. The challenge is making these families and students aware of these opportunities and pointing them in the right direction. Many districts have a migrant specialist whose sole purpose is to help families connect with all the resources available. These specialists can help by increasing meaningful parent communication, providing information about special programs available, and of course, counseling students. Naturally in smaller school district, resources for migrant families may be scarcer. In these cases please encourage them to reach out to their nearest regional education service center. Every ESC will have a migrant specialist ready to help out a school, student or parent. Connecting with these parents is incredibly important.

Remember that many migrant parents have a very limited education and may not fully understand all the benefits higher education may offer their kids.

Again, it's crucial there's a true connection with the parents and not just a data dump that could leave them more overwhelmed than inspired. They need to know why going to college is so important for their kids and be highly jazzed about making that happen. By clearly pointing out the many, many opportunities for their children to have a successful life, the more likely they'll be able to understand the importance of allowing their children to attend class on a more regular basis, like Veronica did when she was thirteen. Veronica is proof that anything is possible if you know the right steps.